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Tim Bath | Kokomo Tribune

Rep. Todd Rokita, R-Indiana, holds a Congress on Your Corner event at the Kokomo-Howard County Public Library Main Branch March 24.

Editorial: Rokita bill will hurt schoolkids

Short-term gains sometimes come at a greater long-term cost. The debacle in Flint, Michigan, is a prime example of this phenomenon.

Sure, local and state governments were able to save a few bucks by switching the city's water source from Lake Michigan via Detroit to the

polluted Flint River, but the mitigation and harmful aftereffects will outweigh any temporary savings by many, many times over.

While not exactly the same situation, a bill authored by Rep. Todd Rokita would see the same equation play out.

The bill currently making its way through the U.S. House of Representatives would change the federal requirements for schools to offer free meals to all students. As reported by The Indianapolis Star's Maureen Groppe on Thursday, 120 Indiana schools that currently offer such assistance would no longer be able to. As it stands, they qualify if the student body of a school had "40 percent already receiving certain other types of government assistance," she reported. "Rokita's bill would raise that requirement to 60 percent."

Rokita has defended himself, as the backlash has been immediate. In a joint statement Wednesday by Rokita and Rep. John Kline, chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, they decried federal mandates in these school's nutrition programs.

Shoot, if that's true, then why raise it from 40 percent to 60 percent? Why not 80 percent (as proposed by Rep. Glenn Grothman, R-Wisconsin) or 100 percent? Are we just picking numbers out of a hat here?

Rokita and Kline might be right in that this saves money in the short term, but children who won't get a decent meal because of this will be suffering

for years. Hungry children can't learn, and this is the only meal some get all day. As we can attest locally with Kokomo Urban Outreach's Buddy Bags program, this need is already great enough. Many organizations across the political spectrum have rightly spoken out against these changes, including The Center for Science in the Public Interest, National Governors Association and the School Nutrition Association.

Like the children of Flint, the children harmed by this legislation will be the long-term victims of short-term savings. And savings that incur more costs aren't savings at all.